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It covers (1) U.S. Federal government documents, especially those from executive branch departments and those from the Congressional branch - - Committees, the U.S. General Accounting Office, and the Congressional Budget Office; (2) policy briefs from major private think tanks, especially those in Washington; and (3) major reports from national professional associations. A few new high quality, high relevance think tank-sponsored books are also listed.

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Reports

Item#1

China, Internet Freedom, and U.S. Policy. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Thomas Lum et al. July 13, 2012.

The People's Republic of China (PRC) has the world's largest number of Internet users, estimated at 500 million people. Despite government efforts to limit the flow of online news, Chinese Internet users are able to access unprecedented amounts of information, and political activists have utilized the Web as a vital communications tool. In recent years, Twitter-like microblogging has surged, resulting in dramatic cases of dissident communication and public comment on sensitive political issues. However, the Web has proven to be less of a democratic catalyst in China than many observers had hoped. The PRC government has one of the most rigorous Internet censorship systems, which relies heavily upon cooperation between the government and private Internet companies. Some U.S. policy makers have been especially critical of the compliance of some U.S. Internet communications and technology (ICT) companies with China's censorship and policing activities.

<http://fpc.state.gov/documents/organization/195388.pdf> [PDF format, 24 pages, 350.52 KB].

Item#2

Domestic Institutional Challenges Facing China's Leadership on the Eve of the 18th Party Congress. The National Bureau of Asian Research. Andrew Mertha. July 2012.

China's institutional weaknesses, often misperceived as strengths, provide the principal challenges to the new, fifth-generation leadership and its ability to execute its policy preferences and meet the growing complexity of state and societal expectations, says the author.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

http://www.nbr.org/publications/asia_policy/AP14/AP14_B_ChinaLeadership.pdf [PDF format, 20 pages, 327.36 KB].

Item#3

The Future of Big Data. Pew Internet & American Life Project. Janna Anderson and Lee Rainie. July 20, 2012.

Big Data: Experts say new forms of information analysis will help people be more nimble and adaptive, but worry over humans' capacity to understand and use these new tools well. Tech experts believe the vast quantities of data that humans and machines will be creating by the year 2020 could enhance productivity, improve organizational transparency, and expand the frontier of the "knowable future." But they worry about "humanity's dashboard" being in government and corporate hands and they are anxious about people's ability to analyze it wisely.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

http://pewinternet.org/~media//Files/Reports/2012/PIP_Future_of_Internet_2012_Big_Data.pdf [PDF format, 41 pages, 1.40 MB].

Item#4

Global Rebalancing: Now or Never. YaleGlobal. Stephen S. Roach. July 19, 2012.

Recent history, the Latin America debt crisis, the US subprime mortgage crisis and now the European debt crisis, offers a lesson that global imbalances are unsustainable. Lured by false promises of future growth, countries borrow big, risking prosperity and stability. Global growth is in question: Wary of debt, U.S. consumers have tightened spending; India and China, as emerging economies, cannot make up that spending in the global markets. Countries, particularly the world's leading economic partnership, U.S. and China, must confront the reality on debt and ease their imbalances, urges Roach. He lays out a rebalancing plan that includes China building the services side of its economy. Roach warns, "There are no shortcuts to sustainable prosperity." Americans must consume less, the Chinese should consume more, and all should consume sensibly.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/now-or-never-global-rebalancing> [HTML format, various paging].

Item#5

Government Transparency: Efforts to Improve Information on Federal Spending. U.S. Government Accountability Office. July 18, 2012.

The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and other federal agencies have taken steps to improve federal spending data available on USAspending.gov. GAO previously made several recommendations to improve these transparency efforts, including that OMB clarify guidance on reporting award data and develop a procedure to ensure agencies report required information. While GAO is not making new recommendations at this time, it underscores the importance of fully implementing its prior recommendations.

<http://www.gao.gov/assets/600/592592.pdf> Fulltext [PDF format, 20 pages, 285.96 KB].

Item#6

The Implications of Military Spending Cuts for NATO's Largest Members. Brookings Institution. Andrew Dorman et al. July 2012.

There have long been debates about the sustainability of the transatlantic alliance and accusations amongst allies of unequal contributions to burden-sharing. But since countries on both sides of the Atlantic have begun introducing new - and often major - military spending cuts in response to the economic crisis, concerns about the future of transatlantic defense cooperation have become more pronounced. A growing number of senior officials are now publicly questioning the future of NATO.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2012/7/military%20spending%20nato%20odonnell/military%20spending%20nato%20odonnell%20pdf> [PDF format, 30 pages, 169 KB].

Item#7

In Search of the Global Middle Class: A New Index. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Uri Dadush and Ali Shimelse. July 2012.

The swelling middle class in emerging economies has received much attention in recent years, as it well should. The implications of its rise are far-reaching, from expanding economic opportunity to transforming the political landscape in some of the world's most populous countries. Measuring the middle class, however, is no easy task. There is no widely accepted definition of what constitutes the middle class, and the commonly used income-based measures suffer from a number of deficiencies, according to the report.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

http://carnegieendowment.org/files/middle_class.pdf [PDF format, 30 pages, 1.42 MB].

Item#8

Midnight Rulemaking. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Maeve P. Carey. July 18, 2012.

During the final months of recent presidential administrations, federal agencies have increased the number of issued regulations. This phenomenon is often referred to as "midnight rulemaking." Various scholars and public officials have documented evidence of midnight rulemaking by several recent outgoing administrations, especially for those outgoing administrations that will be replaced by an administration of a different party.

<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/R42612.pdf> [PDF format, 18 pages, 301.57 KB].

Item#9

The Promise of (and Obstacles to) America's Emerging Growth Story. New American Foundation. Sherle R. Schwenninger and Samuel Sherraden. July 19, 2012.

Economic growth depends on the periodic emergence of several new big drivers of investment and job creation. But America's economic growth story faces serious obstacles: economic crisis in Europe, economic weakness and renewed trade pressures from China, and the coming fiscal cliff and public sector retrenchment in the U.S.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

http://newamerica.net/sites/newamerica.net/files/policydocs/America_Emerging_Growth_Story.pdf [PDF format, 29 pages, 1.22 MB].

Item#10

Public Sector Pensions: How Well Funded Are They, Really? American Enterprise Institute. July 19, 2012.

The financial health of defined benefit pension plans for state and local government workers is a matter of concern for elected officials, taxpayers and the financial markets, all of whom worry about governments' long-term ability to meet their financial obligations. These pension plans have come under increased scrutiny as funding levels have dropped and required contributions have risen.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

http://www.aei.org/files/2012/07/19/-biggs-state-budget-solutions-paper_125345809045.pdf [PDF format, 28 pages, 445.60 KB].

Item#11

The Search for Skills: Demand for H-1B Immigrant Workers in U.S. Metropolitan Areas. Brookings Institution. Neil G. Ruiz et al. July 20, 2012.

The H-1B visa program allows employers to hire foreigners to work in specialty occupations on a temporary basis. Visas are granted in three-year increments with the option to extend up to six years. With sponsorship from their employers, H-1B visa holders may apply for permanent residence, and their H-1B visas can be renewed for one year extensions until their green card is issued. There is a cap on the number of H-1B visas that can be issued each fiscal year. Academic and research institutions are not subject to this cap.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

<http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/reports/2012/7/18%20h1b%20visas%20labor%20immigration/18%20h1b%20visas%20labor%20immigration> [PDF format, 38 pages, 3.51 MB].

Item#12

Syria: No End in Sight. YaleGlobal. Fawaz Gerges. July 17, 2012.

With Damascus in flames and massacres in the countryside, a diplomatic solution to the Syrian crisis seems impossible. International and regional powers are fiercely divided: The US and other Western powers won't try a military intervention without approval from the UN Security Council. Russia and China, permanent members of the UN Security Council, threaten to veto military intervention, and U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton urges other nations to see that the two "pay a price" for staying on the sidelines. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Turkey coordinate on providing arms to the Syrian opposition movement, while Iran and Iraq keep the Assad regime supplied. The rebels are slowly gaining territory, including in the capital, and some high-level military and diplomatic staff members are defecting, but the numbers have not yet reached critical mass to threaten the Assad regime's survival, reports Gerges. With no solutions at hand, peace and stability for Syria seem a distant prospect.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

<http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/content/syria-no-end-sight> [HTML format, various paging].

Item#13

U.S. Poverty Rates Higher, Safety Net Weaker Than in Peer Countries. Economic Policy Institute. Elise Gould and Hilary Wething. July 24, 2012.

Poverty rates in the United States increased over the 2000s, a trend exacerbated by the Great Recession and its aftermath. By 2010, just over 46 million people fell below the U.S. Census Bureau's official poverty line. The report puts the U.S. experience with poverty in an international context, comparing the lower end of the wage and income distribution in the United States with that of "peer" countries,

largely countries within the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) with roughly similar GDP per hour worked as the U.S.

[Note: contains copyrighted material].

<http://www.epi.org/files/2012/ib339-us-poverty-higher-safety-net-weaker.pdf> [PDF format, 7 pages, 719.48 KB].

Item#14

Why Certain Trade Agreements Are Approved as Congressional-Executive Agreements Rather Than as Treaties. Congressional Research Service, Library of Congress. Jeanne J. Grimmett. July 13, 2012.

U.S. trade agreements such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), World Trade Organization agreements, and bilateral free trade agreements (FTAs) have been approved by majority vote of each house rather than by two-thirds vote of the Senate--that is, they have been treated as congressional-executive agreements rather than as treaties. The congressional-executive agreement has been the vehicle for implementing Congress's long-standing policy of seeking trade benefits for the United States through reciprocal trade negotiations. In a succession of statutes, Congress has authorized the President to negotiate and enter into tariff and nontariff barrier (NTB) agreements for limited periods, while permitting NTB and free trade agreements negotiated under this authority to enter into force for the United States only if they are approved by both houses in a bill enacted into public law and other statutory conditions are met; implementing bills are also accorded expedited consideration under the scheme.

<https://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/misc/97-896.pdf> [PDF format, 10 pages, 225.29 KB].